Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics of Intimacy

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Introduction

Elizabeth Bishop's poetic diet was typical for the poets of her generation: her grandfather's recitations of Burns, supplemented by her own reading in the family library of the romantics and the Victorians, were followed by the thrill of the modernists, when in 1923 she received a gift of the Harriet Monroe anthology, *The New Poetry*.[1] At Vassar from 1930 through 1934, she learned her moderns and, in proper Eliotian/New Critical fashion, read and loved Donne, Herbert, and Hopkins. And, like many of her contemporaries, she inherited the legacy of the modern poets, as her own poetry was departing from it. When she defined her position it was to ally herself with the "late-late Post World War I generation," because "I went to Europe earlier than most of my 'contemporary' poets – and I am a few years older than some of them" (letter to Stevenson, 20 Mar. 1963, WU). She wrestled in the mid-1930s with questions raised by modern poets and philosophers about the materiality of poetic language. Yet her poetry is generationally apart from the moderns' stylistic experimentation, tonal impersonality, and ideological effort to "make it new." But it is also unlike the poetry of her contemporaries. She never wrote poetic applications of New Critical methodologies, as did the Fugitives; neither did she feel anxiety over the moderns' influence, nor the weight of American history, as did the early Lowell, who was an intimate friend of hers. Her poetry underwent no major transformations in the 1950s, as Lowell's did, when he met the Beat poets, as Berryman's did, when he attempted the intimate tones of a dialogue with Anne Bradstreet,[2] and as several women poets' did – Levertov, Plath, Rich – when they discovered within the emerging poetic modes ways to write as women. Indeed, Bishop's poetic language is colloquial, her settings local, her address direct and personal, like those of many of her contemporaries.[3] Yet her residency in Brazil in the 1950s and 1960s removed her from the rising schools of postmodern poetry – San Fran-

cisco's Beat poetry, Black Mountain poetry, and that of the New York school.

Situating Elizabeth Bishop within her poetic field, as most critics who try to do so attest, runs one up against the idiosyncrasy Robert Lowell articulated upon reading "From Trollope's Journal":

> I think you never do a poem without your own intuition. You are the only poet now who calls her own tune – rather different from even Pound or Miss Moore who built original styles then continue them – but yours, especially the last dozen or so, are all unpredictably different. (Letter to Bishop, 12 July 1960, VC)

Her poems are "different," Lowell asserts, each from the other and all from the poetry around her. Indeed, "From Trollope's Journal" was oddly matched with the other poems in the issue of *Partisan Review* in which it appeared – Jarrell's "Hope," about his wife and mother, Rich's "A Marriage in the 'Sixties," and several confessional Sexton poems, including one called "The Abortion."[4] Bishop's persona poem, twenty-eight lines that were, in the draft she sent Lowell, divided, as if to spotlight its tight, double sonnet form, is all the odder in this company. Its political intent – she wrote Lowell it was about Eisenhower (18 Nov. 1965, HL) – seems all the more disguised, surrounded here by her contemporaries' openness. Most recently David Kalstone faced Bishop's odd fit in his posthumously published *Becoming a Poet,* which began, as his editor notes, as a book about the relations of post–World War II poets with their predecessors. Gradually, Kalstone admitted in his drafted introduction, Elizabeth Bishop's "intense difference as a poet[ ] eventually took over my book. We write and rewrite literary history. It becomes increasingly clear, the more we know about Elizabeth Bishop, that she makes us describe poetry in a different light" (ix).

Attempting to define this difference, the Irish poet Eavan Boland calls Bishop "the one un-Romantic American poet of her generation" (75). In other words, Boland observes:

> She never suggests that her fishhouses and hymn-loving seals, her Nova Scotia kitchens and Tantramar marshes depend on her. She never intimates to us, as Yeats might in "The Wild Swans at Coole" or Byron in "Childe Harold," that these objects will vanish without her intervention. Her earth is not represented as a dramatized fragment of her consciousness. Instead, she celebrates the separateness, the awesome detachment of the exterior universe. (77)

Bishop rejects the powerful romantic consciousness as a poetic center; she refuses to "exercise the privileges and powers of th[is] Romantic mechanism" (Boland 77). Explaining this mechanism by contrasting it with that of pragmatism, Richard Rorty distinguishes the two move-

ments by the degrees to which they depart from a monologic discourse of truth: while romanticism, particularly in the hands of Hegel, situates truth not in science but in the different and potentially new discourses of literature, pragmatism, or Boland's "un-Romanticism," abandons all claims to truth.[5] A pragmatic world, in which the relations between things are necessarily as real as the things themselves, is left with interacting subjects discovering the use or pleasure of any reality, without a higher authority – poet, God, language, science – encompassing and controlling the process. Recognizing her intimacy with – and not her centrality amid – an interesting world, Bishop listens to the unlikely connections and mutual discoveries of the subjects of her writing, as she recognizes her subjects' unfolding.

Articulating her unromanticism in her own terms in her 1934 notebook, Bishop distinguished between the materiality and the spirituality of poetry:

> It's a question of using the poet's proper materials, with which he is equipped by nature, i.e., immediate, intense physical reactions, a sense of metaphor and decoration in everything – to express something not of them – something I suppose, spiritual. But it proceeds from the material, the material eaten out with acid, pulled down from underneath, made to perform and always kept in order, in its place.[6] Sometimes it cannot be made to indicate its spiritual goal clearly (Some of Hopkins', say, where the point seems to be missing) but even then the spiritual must be felt. [. . .] The other way – of using the supposedly "spiritual" – the beautiful, the nostalgic, the ideal and poetic, to produce the material – is the way of the Romantic, I think – and a great perversity. This may be capable of being treated by a mere studying of simile and metaphor – This is why genuine religious poetry seems to be about as far as poetry can go – and as good as it can be – (Notebook, late July 1934)

Bishop unwittingly invokes something like Remy de Gourmont's belief that "all abstract words are the figuration of a material act."[7] Like him, she insists on the primacy of the poem's own materiality. That this material force is, for her, "eaten out with acid," discolored, raw, and charged with a potency of its own defines well the distinction Boland and Rorty articulate differently between the romantic's faith in essence and Bishop's postromantic, pragmatic slippage, whereby she engages the poet's ordering mechanisms but celebrates most highly what is "not of them," or the element of spiritual surprise that makes the trust in those external forces worthwhile.

This fascination with the mind's processes has invited comparison between her poetry and that of her stylistic mentors, Hopkins and Herbert,[8] and in his book on Bishop, Thomas Travisano draws the connec-

tion between Bishop's efforts to capture the process of a poet's knowing and that of the baroques. He cites her college essay on Hopkins, in which she quotes Morris Croll's "The Baroque Style in Prose": the baroque writers' "purpose," Croll states and Bishop quotes, "was to portray, not a thought, but the mind thinking [. . . ,] the moment in which the truth is still *imagined*" (Travisano 11–12). Therein, Travisano argues, the baroques "attended to the twists and turns of perception" (11), achieving surprise, the poetic quality Bishop most admired.

Although Bishop never articulated her interests as such, it is a short step from Travisano's description of what most fascinated Bishop in the baroque to the terms of an American pragmatism that informed American thinking around Bishop in the late modern period. Though she did no systematic reading of pragmatism, she and Marianne Moore read the "Christian pragmatism"[9] of Reinhold Niebuhr in 1938; John Dewey and she were acquaintances in Key West in the 1940s and perhaps shared conversation about his work; and in response to a query about whether she had seen Leon Edel's biography of Henry James, she responded with pride that the Jameses were hardly new to her: she had read them thoroughly twenty years before, and now, because "Lota has a lot of Wm. James [, . . .] I've even been trying to cope with pragmatism again recently" (letter to Barkers, 23 Mar. 1956, PU). I do not intend, however, to draw the direct links between poet and philosophers as much as to suggest a tradition that embraces them each – a "vocabulary of practise rather than of theory, of action rather than contemplation, in which one can say something useful about truth" (Rorty 162).

Postromanticist, empiricist, and pragmatist, James and Dewey articulated for the modern American period a vision that had its roots in Emersonian thinking and found its way into the poetic practice of such twentieth-century poets as Frost, Stevens, and, I will argue, Elizabeth Bishop. Tracing this tradition in *The Renewal of Literature,* Richard Poirier sets forth some of the terms that link these writers:

> Consider: the emphasis on action, on transitions as a valuable form of action, both in Emerson and in James; the need stressed by both of them for movement *away* from substantives or "resting-places" or settled texts; Frost's definition of a poem as only "a momentary stay against confusion," and the virtue attached by Stevens to becoming "an ignorant man again." (16)

William James asserts that vital to any event are the "prepositions, copulas, and conjunctions" that link the parts, often coincidentally (216). In fact, he argues, "we ought to say a feeling of *and,* a feeling of *if,* a feeling of *but,* and a feeling of *by,* quite as readily as we say a feeling of *blue,* or a feeling of *cold*" (38). Bishop recognized precisely these feelings

in "Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance," a poem whose tourist, back home with the comprehensible, orderly renditions of the world in her engraved Bible, is nonetheless overwhelmed by the proliferation of sensation and emotion experienced in a different world. The closing stanza of the poem begins with the fragment: "Everything only connected by 'and' and 'and,'" as if to suggest that no more definitive connections between the emotions or between the experienced and the observed worlds would suffice. Or rather, as James asserted, these transitive states – these "*tendencies* of the nascent images [. . .] among the *objects* of the stream" (45), this "*psychic overtone, suffusion,*" and these "fringes of relation" (48, 54, his emphases) – participate fully in the making of those worlds: "A man walks suddenly into my field of view, and forthwith becomes part of it. [. . .] I may entirely overlook and fail to notice even so important an object as a man, until the inward event of altering my attention makes me suddenly see him with the other objects there" (159–60). James's very prose method, which layers arguments with anecdotes so that each shades the others, reinforces his premise, allowing his readers to experience the tendencies of his often oddly juxtaposed examples as we are discovering the line of thought they share. With such a pragmatic impulse at play, Bishop's poems enact relationships by means of often surprising conjunctions and transitions. Bringing together land and sea in "The Map," an almanac, a teakettle, and an effusion of tears in "Sestina," or the Vietnam War and her nighttime desk in "12 O'Clock News," she explores the relationships born of often surprising meetings. Bishop was fascinated by the coincidental, musing in her 1935 journal about the mysterious life of the things stuck together in a mail-order catalogue and fantasizing an attic room where the smells, colors, and textures of her life's things would decay together to produce oddly new combinations.

John Dewey was likewise interested in the impact such things have on the one experiencing them, or rather on the interrelations of thought and thing:

> *The odor knows the rose; the rose is known by the odor; and the import of each term is constituted by the relationship in which it stands to the other.* [. . .] The smell which knows is no more merely mental than is the rose known. [. . .] It denotes only the fact that the smell, a real and nonpsychical object, now exercises an intellectual *function*. This new property involves, as James has pointed out, an *additive* relation – a new property possessed by a non-mental object, when that object, occurring in a new context, assumes a further office and use. (*Darwin* 88, 104, his emphases)[10]

Or, as he would argue some fifteen years later, "The qualities never were 'in' the organism; they always were qualities of interactions in which

both extra-organic things and organisms partake" (*Experience* 212). Whereas in James's sentence the individual's thought or imagination inevitably has a grammatical primacy over the thing and its fringes or overtones, Dewey is careful to consider both the grammar and the psychology of the relationship between the seemingly animate and the seemingly inanimate. Especially interested in revising the tendency of empiricism toward dualisms of mind and body, as a means toward a more culturally situated, process-oriented, and consequence-minded philosophy of education, Dewey focuses on what he calls our "undergoing" in *Democracy and Education,* or the significant "flux" produced "when the change made by action is reflected back into a change made in us" (163).

Dewey's carefully articulated effort to give integrity to both changes – in this case they balance each other as equally passive subjects – nicely situates my interest in this book in the images, actions, tones, prosodic structures, and language of Bishop's writing that foregrounds what I will call its "subject–subject relationships." It matters absolutely that these subjects have, as Boland understood, an interactive separateness with and from their author and one another. Reading Bishop's poetry through American pragmatism offers insight into how her poems structurally and thematically enact these relations between. And it gives us a way of reading Bishop's localism – her attention to the ordinary, daily emotions and conversations among subjects. Richard Rorty is particularly interested in this local aspect of pragmatism:

> It is the doctrine that there are no constraints on inquiry save conversational ones – no wholesale constraints derived from the nature of the objects, or of the mind, or of language, but only those retail constraints provided by the remarks of our fellow-inquirers. [. . .]
>
> Our identification with our community – our society, our political tradition, our intellectual heritage – is heightened when we see this community as *ours* rather than *nature's, shaped* rather than *found,* one among many which men have made. In the end, the pragmatists tell us, what matters is our loyalty to other human beings clinging together against the dark, not our hope of getting things right. (165–6)

Recognizing what pragmatism gives up – "there is no method for knowing *when* one has reached the truth, or when one is closer to it than before" (165–6) – Rorty finds some measure of compensation in its offer of local, human communities. But despite his own postmodern situation, Rorty articulates a notion of community that is seemingly gender-, class-, and race-neutral, inevitably rendering hegemonic that which he claims to be "*ours.*" Thus, Rorty's examination of pragmatism leaves unquestioned its often implicit humanism. Vital as are the transitive parts of James's stream of thought, James's confluence of tones, shades, and values never quite loses its central subject or fully embraces multiplicity; nor

does Rorty's. James's fringes are, finally, a "halo or penumbra that surrounds and escorts" the subject (46); Rorty's "shaped" community is "one among many which [undifferentiated] men have made." While Dewey gets as close as empirical pragmatism will to a recognition of the mutuality and multiplicity of subject–subject relationships, his vision as well does not go as far as I need toward a reading of the particularly gendered or the particular sexually and racially oriented subjects of Bishop's poetry.

Grounded by the kind of antiessentialism toward which pragmatism reached, postmodern feminism and cultural anthropology are in turn opening out the field of discourse precisely at this juncture, where they can question the politics of a James-like confluence by deconstructing our assumptions about subjectivity and considering means toward redefinition and revision. Three theorists – Teresa de Lauretis, Clifford Geertz, and Gayatri Spivak – offer three quite different readings of subjectivity, readings implicitly in conversation with one another and each vitally extending the pragmatic frame.

Feminist film theorist Teresa de Lauretis is interested first in the inherent gendering of all subjectivity and further in the politics of that gendering process. Embracing Foucault's methods of theorizing sexuality to unravel the ways we have essentialized and then exploited our gender system, she counters, in *Technologies of Gender,* that the "relations of subjectivity to sociality" are

> constituted in gender, to be sure, though not by sexual difference alone, but rather across languages and cultural representations; a subject engendered in the experiencing of race and class, as well as sexual, relations; a subject, therefore, not unified but rather multiple, and not so much divided as contradicted. (2)

Complicating what we mean when we speak of gender, this feminist theory offers a model not of a head with its halo of significances but of multiple and unequally powerful heads, some receding as others come forward, some wholly shadowed by others more imposing, but each nonetheless constituting a share of the gendered subject. De Lauretis reads the contradiction as follows:

> It is a movement between the (represented) discursive space of the positions made available by hegemonic discourses and the space-off, the elsewhere, of those discourses: those other spaces both discursive and social that exist, since feminist practices have (re)constructed them, in the margins [. . .] of hegemonic discourses and in the interstices of institutions, in counter-practices and new forms of community. [. . .] The movement between them, therefore, is [. . .] the tension of contradiction, multiplicity, and heteronomy. (26)

Whereas both Rorty and de Lauretis are concerned with understanding the forces that make possible a community, de Lauretis begins where Rorty leaves off. She assumes that only when we recognize the contradictory layers across which we are each constituted by such technologies as gender can we assess the ways in which we might in turn "shape" culture or participate as subjects in the community – "in the micropolitical practices of daily life and daily resistances" (25).

Cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz approaches our shaping of culture not from the perspective of a micropolitics of dispersed authority but from the particular authoritative position of the ethnographer. Fully the pragmatist who recognizes the daily, transitive progress of culture and trusts that the suffusions and fringes will shift every meaning, Geertz at the same time responds, in *Works and Lives* and elsewhere, to the inadequacy of humanist notions of truth, insisting that we acknowledge the "highly situated nature of ethnographic description – this ethnographer, in this time, in this place, with these informants, these commitments, and these experiences, a representative of a particular culture, a member of a certain class" (5). Geertz is more optimistic than are many of his colleagues that if the ethnographer recognizes and makes textually available his position "here," he will discover a means of access to what is "there":[11]

> One of the major assumptions upon which anthropological writing rested until only yesterday, that its subjects and its audience were not only separable but morally disconnected, that the first were to be described but not addressed, the second informed but not implicated, has fairly well dissolved. (132)

Gayatri Spivak, who comes to cultural criticism from the fields of deconstruction, feminism, and Marxism, reads differently what Geertz calls "this inter-confusion of object and audience" (133). Whereas he discusses the problem of who indeed one writes for, "Africanists or Africans," for instance, Spivak sees the inter-confusion as far more basic:

> I am progressively inclined [...] to read the retrieval of subaltern consciousness as the charting of what in post-structuralist language would be called the subaltern subject-effect. A subject-effect can be briefly plotted as follows: that which seems to operate as a subject may be part of an immense discontinuous network ("text" in the general sense) of strands that may be termed politics, ideology, economics, history, sexuality, language, and so on. [...] Different knottings and configurations of these strands, determined by heterogeneous determinations which are themselves dependent upon myriad circumstances, produce the effect of an operating subject. Yet the continuist and homogenist deliberative consciousness symptomatically requires a continuous and homogeneous cause for this effect and thus posits a sov-

> ereign and determining subject. This latter is, then, the effect of an effect, and its positing a metalepsis, or the substitution of an effect for a cause. (*Worlds* 204)

As if reexamining de Lauretis's discursive spaces to find no "space-off" but only subject effects in the subaltern's discursive position, Spivak would reject Geertz's optimism as well. Geertz's suggested project of making ethnographic discourse " 'heteroglossial,' so that Emawayish can speak within it alongside the anthropologist in some direct, equal, and independent way" (145), is, in Spivak's terms, flawed from the start: the voice of Michel Leiris's Ethiopian woman, Emawayish (Geertz 129), is already interwoven with the strands of a range of determining textualities, so that listening to it is listening to those other texts.

Like Rorty, Geertz closes his text on a note of optimism, that ethnography can enable conversation across societal lines. But Geertz moves beyond Rorty's universalized community to reassert antiessentialism in the terms of a contemporary pragmatism: concerning himself with "ethnicity, religion, class, gender, language, race," he asserts that

> the next necessary thing [. . .] is to enlarge the possibility of intelligible discourse between people quite different from one another in interest, outlook, wealth, and power, and yet contained in a world where, tumbled as they are into endless connection, it is increasingly difficult to get out of each other's way. (147)

Where Spivak might agree with the desirability of such a conversation, she would insist on its impossibility: because her voice is occupied by the network of subject effects that speak on her behalf, "the subaltern cannot speak."[12]

Though this discussion seems to have moved far from the philosophy of pragmatism, Elizabeth Bishop's poetry has required that I look not only at her American interest in what, in James's words, "link[s] the parts, often coincidentally," but also at what pragmatism only begins to open up – the multiplicity and power dynamics inherent both within subjectivity itself and in the relations between subjects. While I regard Bishop as a pragmatist whom Richard Poirier could have included handily in his reading of the tradition, she was at the same time challenging the authority of the subject, in ways Frost and Stevens were not and in terms to which pragmatism can only point me. Here, then, I will turn for assistance to postmodern theory. Bishop poses these latter questions not, of course, with the political or intellectual commitment of these theorists, but with a similar intuitive response to centers, wholes, subjects, and objects.

Vital to my reading of Bishop's response is her construction of subjectivities that are at their core relational.[13] These subject–subject relations

need not be and are often not between people, nor are they necessarily between clearly demarcated entities at all. In her first major published poem, "The Map," the relationship is between interwoven bodies of land and water. The relationships need not be contained within the borders of the poem; Bishop sometimes expects her reader to feel the responsibilities of the poem's "you." Sometimes they are between figures unconscious of their connection, as in "The Moose" or "In the Waiting Room," until the poem's process records and adjusts their awarenesses. Often, Bishop reveals relationship through variations in metrical form, which might itself support or contradict the poem's articulated emotion. Perhaps most significantly, Bishop discovers over the course of a career an ability to give her poetic objects agency – that sense of "awesome detachment" – which in turn gives them a vital role in the poem's working emotion. "Sestina's" almanac and teakettle provide a domestic ground that can accommodate the child's inscrutable tears; the child depends on these stable, ordinary objects, which assume the power of subjects and can thus bear some of the weight of this roomful of heightened emotions.

Animating her poetic objects, her tonal and grammatical shifts, and her poetic structures with the force and engagement of intimate emotions, Bishop challenges assumed hierarchies between and definitional distinctions of subjects and their others, rendering these fully if not painfully revisable. Essential to such revisions is a recognition of subjectivity as not only multiplicitous to its core but also, from its origins, relational. Whether her poem's subject is a man-moth, a weed, a Brazilian murderer, or a Nova Scotian grandparent, her figure's "multiple and contradicted" "tendencies" (de Lauretis; James) are determined by its changing interactions with its equally multiple and contradicted other. Writing a poetry that enacts same-sex love, for instance, Bishop disorders and variously reconfigures the subjectivity of poetic sexuality. When she explored ethnic subjectivity, as I will argue in Chapters 3 and 5 particularly, she was aware of and attempted to achieve what she called in a drafted introduction to her never-completed book of prose essays on Brazil "a double point of view." Occasionally, her intimacy with Brazilian friends did offer her Brazilian writing a perspective "~~more three-dimensional~~[ ]" than either a foreigner's or Brazilian's alone: the collaborative nature of her authorial position makes possible her most profound inquiries into cultural difference. Her poetry repeatedly engages the questions of her subjects' continuity and discontinuity, both at home among the objects of a grandmother's kitchen or beside a lover in bed, and abroad, amid foreign countries, whose cultural and political practices both challenge and confirm her own. Bishop "call[s her] own tune," I argue in this book, because her poetry's concerns are very simple and quite unique:

she enacts subject–subject relations in their dailiness. Whether she writes about people riding a bus together, one woman shampooing another's hair, or land and water finding each other, her poetry inevitably listens to the voices of layered and changeable subjectivities, so as to explore their daily and profound connections.

In discussing her work, Bishop's early critics formed themselves into two rough camps. There were those who admired the morality of Bishop's emotion and those who, after Marianne Moore, appreciated the disguise of that emotion and the technical accuracy of her art. Moore introduced Bishop's work in *Trial Balances* as follows:

> The specific is judiciously interspersed with generality, and the permitted clue to idiosyncrasy has a becoming evasiveness. We are willing to be apprised of a secret – indeed glad to be – but technique must be cold, sober, conscious of self-justifying ability. Some feminine poets of the present day seem to have grown horns and to like to be frightful and dainty by turns; but distorted propriety suggests effeteness. One would rather disguise than travesty emotion; give away a nice thing than sell it; dismember a garment of rich aesthetic construction than degrade it to the utilitarian offices of the boneyard. One notices the deferences and vigilances in Miss Bishop's writing, and the debt to Donne and to Gerard Hopkins. We look at imitation askance; but like the shell which the hermit-crab selects for itself, it has value – the avowed humility, and the protection. Miss Bishop's ungrudged self-expenditure should also be noticed – automatic, apparently, as part of the nature. Too much cannot be said for this phase of self-respect. (82–3)[14]

If self-expenditure was not quite self-revelation, if one's aesthetics were "accurate and modest," a feature for which Moore praised Bishop in her 1946 review of *North & South* (*CPr* 406), and if, finally, one's poetry was neither utilitarian nor distorted by emotion, especially female emotion, then one began to meet Moore's high moral standards for poetry. With Moore's (and Moore's mother's) mentorship and editorial assistance over the years, Bishop did.

Louise Bogan, who was similarly pleased that Bishop had sloughed what she considered to be the invasive sentimentalism of the Teasdale–Wylie type of female poetry, praised Bishop's poems for their objectivity:

> They strike no attitudes and have not an ounce of superfluous emotional weight, and they combine an unforced ironic humor with a naturalist's accuracy of observation, for Miss Bishop, although she frequently writes fantasy, is firmly in touch with the real world and takes a Thoreaulike interest in whatever catches her attention. (Schwartz and Estess 182)

The opening of James Southworth's 1959 essay epitomizes this sort of criticism: "The poetry of Elizabeth Bishop, except for some ten poems [which he did acknowledge are, by contrast, "passionately subjective"], is as objective as poetry can well be." He further defined Bishop's objectivity in terms similar to Bogan's: "She is not interested in the abstract truth at the end of the road, but in the concrete truths that lie along the way." To illustrate the type of truths he meant, he invoked captured moments in painting, "a bowl of peaches by Cézanne, a wheat field by Van Gogh, a lady playing the lute by Ter Borch" (213–14).

While he accepted the clichés about what is good in women's poetry, addressing Bishop's "restraint, calm, and proportion" in his 1946 review, Randall Jarrell was most interested in the "emotional weight" that Bogan was glad to see constrained. Bishop's art, he showed, serves a postwar morality:

> Her work is unusually personal and honest in its wit, perception, and sensitivity – and in its restrictions too; all her poems have written underneath, *I have seen it*. She is morally so attractive, in poems like "The Fish" or "Roosters," because she understands so well that the wickedness and confusion of the age can explain and extenuate other people's wickedness and confusion, but not, for you, your own; that morality, for the individual, is usually a small, personal, statistical, but heartbreaking or heartwarming affair of omissions and commissions the greatest of which will seem infinitesimal, ludicrously beneath notice, to those who govern, rationalize, and deplore; [. . .] that beneath our lives "there is inescapable hope, the pivot," so that in the revolution of things even the heartsick Peter can someday find "his dreadful rooster come to mean forgiveness"; that when you see the snapped lines trailing, "a five-haired beard of wisdom," from the great fish's aching jaw, it is then that victory fills "the little rented boat," that the oil on the bilgewater by the rusty engine is "rainbow, rainbow, rainbow!" – that you let the fish go. (Schwartz and Estess 181)

Jarrell's review, pressured by his own postwar sensitivities, is stunning in its distinction between self-consciousness and consciousness of the other outside. Although his closing lines seem to leave Bishop behind in their excitement of layered quotation and projection of a "you" beyond her, Jarrell nonetheless argues with passion that one can derive a moral vision from Bishop's poetic moments.

Interested likewise in this vision in his 1947 review, "Thomas, Bishop, and Williams," Robert Lowell discussed not its isolatable moments but the emotional oppositions inherent in her poems' process.[15] Seeing restless motion and equally unsettling closure as paradoxical counterpoints in Bishop's art, he traced the course between. She appreciated the insight:

his "is the only review that goes at things in what *I* think is the right way" (letter to Lowell, 14 Aug. 1947, HL):

> There are two opposing factors. The first is something in motion, weary but persisting, almost always failing and on the point of disintegrating, and yet, for the most part, stoically maintained. This is morality, memory, the weed that grows to divide, and the dawn that advances, illuminates and calls to work. [. . .] The second factor is a terminus: rest, sleep, fulfillment or death. This is the imaginary iceberg, the moon which the Man-moth thinks is a small clean hole through which he must thrust his head. [. . .]
>
> The motion-process is usually accepted as necessary and, therefore, good; yet it is dreary and exhausting. But the formula is mysterious and gently varies with its objects. The terminus is sometimes pathetically or humorously desired as a letting-go or annihilation; sometimes it is fulfillment and the complete harmonious exercise of one's faculties. (Schwartz and Estess 186–7)

Lowell's review confronted unsettling turns in Bishop's poetry decades before postmodern theory opened up the disruptive as a fruitful angle of literary inquiry. But he did so by labeling the opposing factors "a single symbolic pattern" that encompasses "at least nine-tenths" of the poems in *North & South,* thus making academic the potentially disturbing movement, now safe within a New Critical establishment.

In the first full-length book on Bishop, Anne Stevenson engaged in an early form of interdisciplinarity, applying the varied theories of Hofmannsthal (58), Wittgenstein (114–16), David Bohm's modern physics, and Roberto Bonola's non-Euclidean geometry (118) to Bishop's work. Moving in quite the opposite direction, in keeping with the psychological forms of inquiry of the mid-1970s, Jerome Mazzaro offered the first turn inward toward an Elizabeth Bishop who makes her personal conflicts available to her poetic perception. Near the end of his essay, Mazzaro defined Bishop's difference from Roethke's, Lowell's, Jarrell's, and Berryman's ego promotion – their "rarity" – and their imposition of will on their surroundings:

> One has the sense particularly in these late poems that she has lived the life she imagined – with all its necessary disappointments – and, despite the narrow range of choice and the pain of disappointment, she is willing to see her past as the only kind of life she could have lived. (195)

Using as much as he knew of her life as guide, he teased out what he called the "Imagist attachment of emotion to objects" (167), in his readings of dozens of her poems and prose pieces. Although he was sometimes wrong, particularly when he allowed stereotypes of femaleness to determine his response, his essay is important for its boldness. David Kal-

stone's penetrating analyses in his posthumously published *Becoming a Poet* and in several earlier essays increasingly turned toward what he called in 1977 her "inner landscapes." "These poems," he wrote about her first two books of poetry,

> both describe and set themselves at the limits of description. Bishop lets us know that every detail is a boundary, not a Blakean microcosm. Because of the limits they suggest, details vibrate with a meaning beyond mere physical presence. Landscapes meant to sound detached are really inner landscapes. They show an effort at reconstituting the world as if it were in danger of being continually lost. (*Temperaments* 22)

Kalstone is particularly interested here in the point of juncture between Bishop's emotions and memory and her world. In the later book, where he explores the meeting of these personal queries and her intimate relationships with Moore and Lowell, Kalstone makes the moment of her poems immediate to us, as he is offering personal, poetic, and historical contexts for them. Kalstone was perhaps Bishop's most kindred spirit as a critic. When he quotes from her letters and notebooks his insights match hers, their two voices yielding up her life and poetry as if in intimate conversation.

Feminist critics have approached Bishop less with such unconditional affection than with a challenge: she is a woman poet, now how? In 1983 Adrienne Rich discussed Bishop's lesbianism as the means to her insight about and sympathy with the position of the outsider ("Outsider" 17). Rich's article is self-reflexive; it is as much about her ability now to revise her 1971 dismissal of Bishop as it is about Bishop's poetics.[16] The explorations of academic feminists in the 1980s have taken at least two directions. Searching for a female line that includes Bishop, Joanne Feit Diehl and co-writers Lynn Keller and Cristanne Miller discuss Dickinson as a precursor to Bishop. While Feit Diehl explores the ways that Bishop, like Dickinson, gains authority by becoming a "transsexual self-as-poet," subverting her female or lesbian voice so that it speaks palimpsestically within male or genderless personas (135), Keller and Miller use feminist studies of language and gender to argue a tradition wherein both writers use clichéd feminine speech patterns and various forms of indirection to empower their images and language. "Bishop creates a breezy chatter within which weighty emotions become bearable and radical suggestions possible" (542–3). In combination, the two essays are valuable in their exploration of how Bishop wrote as and seemed not to write as a woman. Three essays that came out within months of each other plumb Moore and Bishop's correspondence in analyzing this important modernist literary relationship;[17] in her 1990 book, Jeredith Merrin studies the relationship through an analysis of their literary influences, or the "maternity